

## Sermon 19 September 2021

By Isaac De Jongh

We are in the third week in “Season of Creation” and part of the theme “OIKOS” – a home for all, we are looking at the word ECUMENICAL.

In week one we looked at ECONOMY – “oikos – nomos” – God’s rules for our common home and in week two ECOLOGY – “oikos – logia” – protecting and studying our common home.

Today the third word comes from the root of oikos is ECUMENICAL, which comes from – oikoumene – the whole inhabited world. Our response to oikoumene is that the church should be one – Christian unity. God has created this, our common home and is seeking justice, equity, reconciliation and the flourishing of the whole of creation. My first experience of Christian unity was with father Dennis at St. Francis of Assisi, when most of the different denomination come together as one. Working together ecumenically, recognizing that we are all part of the “Oikos tou Theou” - the household of God, the church (Eph 2: 19) “Thus you are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow citizens with God’s people, members of God’s household.” I remember the church being visible during this time in this community and sharing a common purpose – the Gospel of Jesus. Father Dennis was very passionate about ecumenism and this flowed over into Brixton. We interact and have a good relationship with the NG church. As for the other denominations there was always an excuse, but this should not deter as from continue, praying for the household of God, the church to be one.

We are equal in the eyes of God our creator in this oikos journey, and ecumenism should be part of our lives, building Christian unity. And as good stewards, ensuring we preserve and project God’s creation. We must be a constant witness against the economies of exclusion, which takes God’s given resources of the earth and the labour of the poor and deliver into the hands of the wealthy.

The former prime minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill, took a taxi to the BBC office for an interview.

When he arrived he asked the driver to wait for him for forty minutes until he gets back. The driver apologized and said, he can’t, because he had to go home to listen to Winston Churchill’s speech. Churchill was amazed and delighted with the man’s desire to listen to his speech. He took out ten pounds and gave it to the taxi driver without telling him who he was. The driver took the money and promised to wait for him until he gets back and said Churchill can go to hell!

You can see how principles have been modified against money; nations sold for money, honour for money; families split for money; friends separated for money; people killed for money; and people being made slaves to money.

We have explored the meaning of the word “oikos” – our home, over the last three weeks and have to commit ourselves to making this a better world for our children to grow up in. It is a word with great significance because oikos is the root word for three important terms: ECONOMY, ECOLOGY and ECUMENICAL. This points us to the interconnections between God’s creation, economic justice and the role of the church community.

## Proverbs 31: 10-31

One of the things we observe about the Bible is that it takes a very high view of women. This is evident probably in one of the most famous passages on the virtuous woman in her role as a wife and a mother. Such commendation would never be found in pagan cultures during Bible times. In the ancient world, women were regarded by most cultures only for their charm and beauty, but with substance. They were often seen as objects, and their worth was only measured in the number of children they could bear.

We would take this chapter literally and think that this is meant to be a job description for a good and industrious wife. It also does not suggest that women are meant to do everything in the home while their husbands sit in the places of honour and boast. This chapter is rather about wisdom. Wisdom is often spoken of in feminine terms.

It is wisdom that models the way to look after our home. Note how she ensures everyone and everything can flourish; her family, the poor, the land and the economy. We need to recognize the importance of faith and science working hand in hand, realising that we must be guided by the ancient wisdoms of our ancestors and the voices of indigenous people. Where do we find such wisdom? The spirit of God will guide us, but we must also listen to scientists who are also guided by wisdom.

## Psalm 1

This Psalm is ultimately about the way in which the righteous and wicked each live and the results that they reap. It is framed in a discussion about the "blessed man." Psalm 1 is considered a Psalm of wisdom, as the focus of the Psalm is not expressing the prophetic word of God, nor does it exalt God, but rather it offers insight and guidance to the person who seeks to live a life that is pleasing to God. Everybody wants to be happy. Every man wants to be a blessed man. The problem is that far too few want to be a godly man.

Merely wanting to be happy and blessed will not make it so. Only those who are willing to be the kind of man described in Psalm 1 will ever know the kind of life described in Psalm 1.

By God's grace, you can exclude from your life the things that will destroy. You can experience the kind of life that is exceptional and unique. If you are ready and willing, God can help you become a Psalm 1 man or woman.

## James 3: 13- 4:3, 7-8a

(John 14:27) Jesus said "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Our problem is that we don't understand peace. We have defined peace as the absence of something, conflict, or worry, of trouble, of doubt, but Jesus wants us to define peace as a presence. Peace is not what we've emptied from ourselves, but what we've filled ourselves with. Wisdom is a gift from God and today James writes that there are two kinds of wisdom, that which is from the earth and that which is from above. We know what the wisdom of the earth is like and experience this daily inwardly and outwardly. The wisdom that is from heaven is characterised by love and loving action. James encourages the readers to be

reconciled to God and live according to God's laws. "The wisdom that comes from heaven is all pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." James 3:17-18.

Peace like joy then, is an outcome of love. When we learn to love God, we will know peace. When we learn to love like God, then we will make peace; we will sow peace.

As a community of faith the church, we need to pray that God will grant us the wisdom from above on our oikos journey.

Mark 9: 30-37

This is the second time that Jesus tells the disciples that the Son of Man will be betrayed and killed. On this occasion, rather than ask him what he means, they simply continue to walk with him. They were fearful and afraid and in order to distract themselves from fear and being afraid, they decided to argue. They were trying to figure out who was the greatest among them. Jesus asks what they been talking about. In response to their foolishness, he sat down and told them what it really means to be great. In Jesus' time, as in ours, the people who were "first" were often people who had more of something; more money, more talent, more influential friends, more education, more charm. What is different about Jesus' teaching is that he said you don't need any of those things in order to be first in God's Kingdom. In fact, in order to be first, you must be willing to be last. Being first isn't most important. Being of service is.

Jesus reminds his disciples that in the God's kingdom servanthood is more desirable than power or status and that they should focus on humility and love above power and prestige.

Jesus tells us that in welcoming children we welcome God himself. The motive for receiving such a person, such as a small, unimportant child, is that it is done as unto the Lord done in His name. It is not done because something of great value may come to you because of the child; it is something you do regardless of whether you receive any benefit in doing it, because it is done in His name.

There are two definitions or choices for greatness. One is the world's – which is being lived out by the disciples – and says greatness is about being first. It's about getting a position where you can be served. And then we have what Jesus espoused – which is putting everyone else in front of yourself and being a servant.

If you choose the world's way, you come in last, and God will humble you. If you choose God's way, and make yourself a servant, God will exalt you, He will make you great.

Most of the time people in power apply the wisdom of the earth and not the wisdom from above. That is the reason why we have so many unresolved threats to our environment – climate change, species loss and inequality that points to lack of care for creation and each other, a lack that has seen humanity focus on individual wellbeing and financial success.

As we continue ecumenically to build God's Kingdom and be the good stewards we are called to be – let us remember, the greatest in God's kingdom is servant of all. Amen.